"It is in the marriage of credible data use and increased stewardship behavior that the true potential and vitality of citizen monitoring begins to emerge." – Steven Hubbell

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Welcome friends, colleagues, and conference participants,

On behalf of the extensive volunteer monitoring community, we welcome you to this conference and invite you to experience presentations highlighting the broad spectrum of volunteer monitoring activities.

Across the country, and indeed throughout the world, volunteer monitors watch over watersheds, often where no one else is looking. They monitor the condition of streams, rivers, lakes, reservoirs, estuaries, coastal waters, wetlands, and wells. They do this because they want to help protect or restore a favorite water body near where they live, work, or play. They do this to ensure safe drinking water. They educate themselves, their community, and decision-makers. They recognize the importance of their role as watershed stewards. They make a difference.

Volunteers do physical, chemical and biological monitoring. They measure Secchi depth in lakes, identify stream benthic macroinvertebrates, and monitor bacteria levels. They make visual observations of habitat, land uses, and storm impacts, and assess the abundance and diversity of plants, fish, birds, and other wildlife. Some have undertaken more exotic activities, examining water samples for toxic phytoplankton or monitoring the health of coral reefs. Volunteers count and catalog beach debris, participate in restoring degraded habitats, and help monitor the success of restoration efforts.

When you talk to state agency staff about uses of volunteer monitoring data, they tend to focus on state-level uses like EPA's 305(b) report and 303(d) listing. And indeed volunteer data are increasingly finding their way into state reports and TMDL plans. But volunteer organizations are quick to point out that state-level uses are not the holy grail of volunteer data use. Volunteer monitoring is for the most part a local activity with local impacts. Watershed associations, lakefront homeowner associations, and other community groups use their monitoring data to guide their own restoration projects and management activities. They present their data to local planning committees or town councils to support proposals for protective ordinances and policies.

Volunteer monitoring of lakes and streams began in the 1970s and grew rapidly. Many volunteer monitoring programs have been going strong for more than 20 years, providing an unparalleled long-term record of water quality and the ability to assess whether water quality improvement and restoration projects are truly working. As volunteer monitoring has grown and matured, programs increasingly emphasize assuring data quality and documenting metadata so that the comparability of their data to that of others can be recognized. Credibility is key.

We invite all conference participants to take advantage of workshops, presentations, and informal exchanges, indeed to Connect for Clean Water with all members our vibrant monitoring community, especially those at this conference!

For our waters,

The Volunteer Monitoring Conference Planning Sub-Committee
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